

**Oral History Interviews, Reunion Weekend 2008**

**Interview with Ebie and Jim Richards, class of 1948**

**Interviewed by Julia Stringfellow**

**John G. Strange Commons, Main Hall**

**Interview #2 for June 21, 2008**

[Start: 00:00:00]

**1. Can each of you state your name?**

E: I'm Ebie Richards.

J: I'm Jim Richards.

**2. And what years did you graduate from Lawrence?**

E: 1948.

J: Together, 1948.

**3. And why did you choose to attend Lawrence?**

E: I don't know. I went to a school, I really don't know how I chose Lawrence, it was so long ago. But I was looking for a small, Midwestern school, and this was a good distance, and I honestly don't remember looking at any place else or what I did to get here.

**4. And you had known about Lawrence for a long time?**

E: Probably not, probably had heard about it at high school. I went to New Trier High School in Winnetka, Illinois, and lots of people went to Lawrence. I don't really remember how I got here.

J: Seemed like the thing to do.

E: It seemed like the thing to do.

J: I graduated from high school in 1942 at age 16. In the little town where I grew up they had a half year system, I started first grade in February. So come June of 1942 I had had three and a half years of high school, but my father was being transferred to Chicago, I had to make a decision to either stay on and finish another semester or go to another school. I looked into the credits I had and lacked only one credit. I lacked a credit in Civics which basically is Civics. So I arranged to cram and take the final exam, and they gave me credit. I was able to graduate in June at 16. I turned 17 almost immediately thereafter. I was pretty young, I didn't feel like I was ready for college. So I went off to chase a fantasy, that of being a radio announcer, so dramatic, so whatever. And the farmer hauled another load away! No, I managed to get a job doing that sort of thing long

enough to realize that I didn't know anything and needed to go to school. My folks were now living on the North Shore in Chicago, and I entered Northwestern in February of 1943 and got two quarters.

Meanwhile I was about to turn 18, and the war was on, and I had to make a choice as to what I was going to do. I chose to, I wanted to go in the Navy Air Corps and they wouldn't accept me because I had teeth that weren't straight enough. So I ran across the street and got accepted for the Army Air Corps and they took me in. So two years later, out of the Air Corps, I rode my motor scooter, which is another story that does have something to do with Lawrence, from Montgomery, Alabama, to Chicago in the middle of winter.

Then since it was about time for school to start someplace, where do I go? So I looked around. My cousin happened to be going to school here, and Gene Friske, who was class of 1949, so I came up here to take a look at the school. This was the time when men were returning from the war and campus didn't have any men on it, I guess the V-12 program was over at that point, and there were very few men on campus. I had joined Beta Theta Pi fraternity chapter at Northwestern, and came up here and I was drawn immediately to Beta house, that was a point for which I could look at the school. On that particular day, Ebie was coming home from a ski trip to Rib Mountain. I met her on that occasion, and I stayed over long enough I guess to go to a Physics class Monday morning. I'll leave that for you to tell.

At any rate, we met and it seemed like a nice match, not long after that I hung my pin on her, after a few years we decided to get married. And we did that after we graduated, we graduated in 1948, married in October of 1948, and have been class agent ever since. I studied Physics here, got a job in Physics, I got a job in Argonne Laboratories in Lemont, Illinois. That was a nice period of time. I learned a bit, most of which I didn't know enough to make a living in this business. I'd better go back to graduate school, entered Northwestern at that point, and did my graduate work there. I got a job following that, and eventually it brought me to the Twin Cities, and we've been there ever since.

**[00:06:25]**

**5. And do you want to tell the story that you were referring to?**

E: Well, I was taking Physics to improve my mind or whatever, and he appeared in my Physics class the next Monday morning, the next day, and he didn't have a book. So I was sitting next to him and I offered my book to share. I spent the entire time looking at his eyebrows, eyelashes. So we were in Physics together, and I had that one class only and that was his major. But at the time all of us were eating at Sage, all the fraternities were eating at Sage I think. They didn't have their own commissary. So we'd stand in line and a lot of us gals were knitting socks and standing in line, waiting for the meal. Then after the meal we always sat around in a big lounge at Sage. And that's where we really connected, because I grew up in Glencoe, Illinois, and his family had moved to Wilmette,

and there were some commonalities that we were just drawn together with sort of similar backgrounds. And that's why it continued the way it did.

J: We knew some of the same people for different reasons.

E: That was the comfortable commonality.

**6. What were some of the activities that you all were involved in while at Lawrence? Like you were a member of the Betas.**

E: I am a Delta Gamma and we did sorority types of things. I was the president at one time. That was always fun, our rooms were off-campus, there was a Panhellenic house that housed the other sorority for their meetings. But we seemed to be in a private home about two blocks over, that didn't matter. But the nice part was we all lived together in the dorms and it didn't matter. The sororities met and did their thing, but we lived together in the dorms, and that was good.

I was on the Judicial Board, and I was a member of Pi Sigma. I was a French major, Spanish minor, and a member of Mortar Board. I sang in the choir, and we just had a great time. It was small and cozy. It seems now, and it's wonderful the diversity of the university, but it's almost fragmenting to us at our age. It's hard to pull it back together. This weekend I went into the "Foreign Language in the 21st Century," and that was just amazing. To compare the way that I had to do it, one on one with my professor, to what they have in the computer world to learn this stuff, it just is amazing. I'm really proud of this place, very proud.

J: It's a different place, but it's appropriately different because it's a different time, different sociological challenges.

**[00:10:23]**

**7. What were some of the activities that you were involved in in addition to being a Beta?**

J: I did some work in the theatre with Ted Cloak. I can't remember them all, but I was in the chorus in *Antigone*, which involved memorizing about fifteen pages of text. At one time I could remember it all and I can't remember a word of it now!

E: And *Laburnum Grove*, that was a play that was done in the gym, the old gym. The girls' gym, I think it was.

**The first Alexander gym.**

E: No, the first girls' gym on campus. Wasn't that a gym?

J: That was torn down about the same time that the Observatory was torn down. There was a thought at one time, I remember seeing pictures of the Observatory and the gym being melded into one building and part of something else, that was one of the great plans that never happened.

E: And you were in Sunset Players, that was a radio show.

J: Yes, Radio Players. Growing up in Pekin, I lived next door to a guy whose father was the head of the local telephone exchange. And consequently his son and I were contemporaries and in the same class at school. I acquired a certain amount of surplus telephone equipment. With various sundry and miscellaneous parts we assembled some telephones.

When I came up here, I'm now very much in love with this lady, I wanted to maintain closer contact. I thought, "Well, wouldn't it be slick if I put one telephone in my room and one telephone in Ebie's room." And I wired it across the street. That would be a good idea. These didn't look much like telephones; they looked like cheese boxes with an old-fashioned receiver. But it worked. And I asked Mr. Watts, what was his first name? Ralph Watts, who was general manager or something, business manager of the school, for permission to run a wire across the street from one dorm to another. And he thought for a moment, and said, "Well, normally we would discourage this kind of thing. But we hate to stifle initiative, so you go ahead and do it." So I strung a wire across the street from the Beta house to Sage, right across John Street. And it worked.

The luck was such that right then in 1947 I think it was, there was a nationwide telephone strike. Every telephone in the nation was dead. You couldn't make a pay phone call, there was no such things as cell phones, no calls into the dorms, no calls out of the dorms. But my telephone from my Beta house room to her dorm room. And that caught on with Marguerite Schumann.

E: Marguerite Schumann, have you heard that name, Schuie?

J: She took pictures, and put it on the Associated Press. And it was picked up, it was a timely story, so it was picked up as a human interest story and published in papers all over the country. And Edie's father was getting clippings mailed back to him from his associates around the country. "What's this about your daughter?"

E: That's a great story.

**It is.**

J: It was just one of those silly things. It was a nuisance though, because the Betas that wanted to talk to their girlfriends would call up and have you run all over Sage. Love on the campus is a many-splendored thing.

**[00:14:35]**

E: Tell her about the scooter.

J: I bought a motor scooter when I was in the Air Force. I was planning to sell it, as the previous owners had done, when they got their discharge papers because the war was over, time to go home. It took time to process paperwork, so I had a few weeks where I had some time on my hands, so I bought a motor scooter for personal transportation. And when it came time for me to sell it to somebody, the guy that I had arranged this with had changed his mind and he didn't want it. So five o'clock in the afternoon, I have decisions to make. I can abandon the thing, give it to somebody, or I can ship it home, then you have to crate it, why don't I just drive it home. And with about that much forethought which was not very much thought at all, I drove it home starting at five o'clock in the evening.

E: In November.

J: I got as far as Birmingham, Alabama, from Montgomery the first evening, and it was about midnight.

E: 35 miles an hour.

J: And I got up the next day and drove it until about ten o'clock at night, got to Evansville, Indiana, and next day made it home to Chicago. I kept that scooter and brought it up to campus. We had the scooter on campus. And it appears in pictures in the *Ariel*.

E: Didn't you have to have permission to have that scooter?

J: I think I asked permission.

E: You had to ask permission, because there were no cars on campus.

J: No cars on campus, but I could have the scooter. That was transportation to the West End Tavern on a date. The West End Tavern doesn't exist anymore, but they had frog legs and curly fries. The West End Tavern doesn't exist anymore, it's been gone for about twenty years.

### **8. Where was it at, was it nearby?**

J: It was on College Avenue across the tracks from the other side of the street. It was in that neighborhood. It was a way to get to the laundromat, it was a way to go to the movies.

E: It was a way for you to get home.

J: And I drove it home. In fact I had to drive it home on one occasion, you're not going to let me tell that story? Goodness gracious, why not? I'll tell you privately later. At any rate, it provided me transportation. And Bruce Buchanan, my roommate from the Beta house, you probably know Bruce.

**Yes, I do.**

J: His wife Betty Wheeler Buchanan, Ebie, and I, all four of us, and a case of beer, and a picnic lunch, went on a picnic.

E: On the scooter.

J: On the scooter, all four of us. It went downhill real good. We had to help it a little bit getting up hill, but we managed to get out, I can't remember where it was, not very far, five miles, Sunset Park, whatever. We had a picnic and got home safely. It was wonderful.

E: Oh, the simplicity of it all.

J: We kept the scooter a year and a half into our marriage until we could afford to buy a car.

E: It was \$600 used.

J: I ended up selling it for about \$50 less than I paid for it in the first place. One of the best investments I ever made. But since the scooter does appear in pictures published in the *Ariel*, it might have significance for history.

**[00:19:09]**

**9. Who were some of the professors that made a big impact on you that probably influenced you the most?**

J: Dr. Paul Gilbert, of course my professor in my chosen major was a big influence. I minored in Math, and I had Dr. Berry and I think I had a course from Jim Stewart. Jim Stewart was a sweet guy. He was at our reunions, many of them, for a long time. I think he's dead now. I always remember Dr. Berry. He did a number that long times a number that long would be a number that long, then he'd write down the number, three significant figures. He was doing logarithms in his head. He was basically, you can do that I guess, adding logarithms is like multiplying. I think I took a course from him in theory of numbers, I remember nothing of that course, nothing. I think we finally threw it away, we kept all of those textbooks.

E: It obviously didn't affect your career.

J: It didn't. I remembered nothing of it and I still got an A. That doesn't say much for the teaching, does it? I'm sorry about that. It's just that it was a very complex class, and apparently he enjoyed theory of numbers and he paid us the compliment of giving us an A for sitting through his passion.

### **10. And what about you?**

E: Mine was in French, I loved Anne Jones. She was such a sweetheart. My first classes were from her, and the other ones were from Dr. Baker. I don't know if you remember him. People were telling me he used to come with green hair, but I don't remember that. All I remember is how our knowledge of French was a one on one thing, about six of us in the class and Dr. Baker. Any conversation we had was that, and that was the extent of our ability to speak, and I know that I could read and write it and understand it well in French. But the speaking was nothing. And then to go to this lab here this weekend and see all this stuff, just was unreal. But I really enjoyed it, I like languages. I enjoyed those two particular ones. Then I did take an Econ course from Dr. Bober, that was awful, just awful. All these smart guys in it, I didn't get it at all, he was real intimidating. But that's okay, I didn't flunk it. I made it through.

J: Didn't you take a class in education?

E: Yes, I did, George Walter. I did get my certification to teach. I keep forgetting. But I never did teach. So I married Jim and became a professional volunteer which most of my friends were doing. So that was how it went.

### **11. Well, we're nearly out of time. Are there any other stories that either of you would like to share?**

E: I think those were pretty good ones. The telephone and the scooter are the fun things that no one else did.

J: Well, Physics dominated my career. I went to work and retired working as a physicist. Since then I've been volunteering at the Science museum in Minnesota, and Ebie joins me in that activity. She greets the schoolchildren and works at the information booth. We're staying active in our community, other volunteer activities, greeting people and that sort of thing.

E: But we just love this place. We've been to many reunions, and we've been class agents happily. I'll say it's time to write the letter, and he doesn't groan too much.

J: Yes, that's always an interesting process. We try to get a start of some sort to write a letter, and I'll write a letter, and Ebie will edit it. And I'll come back and edit it again, after two or three tries we're satisfied.

E: We tweak it and send it in.

**We're out of time. I'm going to go ahead and turn off the recorder.**

**[End: 00:24:41]**